Dialectical Practices in Education: Creating Third Spaces in the Education of Teachers

by Elizabeth B. Kozleski

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This special issue of *Teacher Education and Special Education* (*TESE*) offers a commentary on how special education teacher education has been in the eye of the stormy process of discovering the professional knowledge and boundaries of a discipline that has been inventing itself since its establishment as a field of special education in 1975 with the passage of P.L. 94-142. By focusing on the ways in which special education has developed an approach to preparing teachers for practice through the lens of collaborative teacher education, the authors of the articles in this issue engage the historical and contemporary tensions that lie in how we pass the assumptions, knowledge, practices, and policies connected to special education to subsequent generations of teachers and teacher educators.

The work of designing programs assumes that there is a coherent body of knowledge to be conveyed and that there are historical and well-documented systems of relaying this knowledge that can be identified, examined, improved, and engaged in light of the changing social, political, and economic realities of the worlds in which we live. Thus, examining programs means that the authors must acknowledge and engage these issues and they do so in lively, well documented articles that both offer ways of thinking and examining the issues as well as pose important questions for continued work. Pugach, Blanton and Correa organize their historical analysis of special education collaborative teacher education into three segments based on the foregrounded tensions within the field and the external pressures experienced during those eras. Brownell, Griffin, Leko, and Stephens offer a way of conceptualizing the challenges that researchers face in expanding our understanding of collaborative teacher education programs. Blanton and Pugach provide a framework for thinking about the design conundrums that programs face and explore its utility and contribution to making hidden assumptions explicit in why and how we design and deliver teacher education. Oyler's contribution focuses on the design of a teacher education program that accounts for technical, contextual and critical knowledge frameworks that can undergird how teachers understand, enact, and contest curriculum, assessment, and pedagogies in their classrooms.

Using these four articles as anchors, I offer the metaphor of *third space* as a way of engaging authors and readers in a recursive interaction around the ideas presented in this issue, a dialectic, if you will, about the ways in which we build a productive, inclusive discourse around teaching and learning in P-12 schools as well as in our university programs. Third space has been defined as an imagined place where narratives and counter narratives converge in ways that make it possible to disrupt and change the transcendent narrative (Gutierrez, Rhymes, & Larson, 1995). Creating the opportunity to be in this space allows individuals and groups who may hold conflicting understandings of (a) the way that teachers come to know their practice, (b) the way that problems are resolved through policy, research, and/or practice; (c) the nature of the kinds of teacher education problems worth solving (e.g., alternative versus university-based programs), and (d) the ways in which representations of reality are expressed through the specialized, professionalized language that we use. The concept of *third space* seems particularly apropos here because the assumptions undergirding collaborative programs of teacher education challenge the ways we conceptualize learning, what is to be learned and by whom, and thus, how we should teach and assess the value of our work.

The third space metaphor works as a space for discourse to be engaged. Yet that space must be contextualized within local, regional, national, and international social, political, and economic contexts. As I write this, the era of collective bargaining is ending, for the time being, in states with long histories of progressive, labor oriented politics beginning as early as the 1930s onward. In part, the demise of collective bargaining comes at a vulnerable crossroads in the maelstrom of devastated public coffers, the increasingly rancorous critique of teacher capabilities, and the US rankings in the *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).* Concerns about the quality of US education has led to an increasing focus on teachers absent the connection between outcomes and the affordances and constraints placed on teachers by the schools in which they teach, the administrative units that employ them, and the state mandated curricula and assessments that provide the single measure of accountability.

Another profound part of the context of our times is the ongoing global diaspora. Composed of peoples displaced by famine, dictatorship, war, poverty, and caste systems akin to social forms of

apartheid, the diaspora continues but has been disturbed through mass civilian protest and disobedience in 2011, most notably in northern Africa. Many people involved in the diaspora have found homes and places to construct new identities in which they are neither exactly like their families and friends who stayed behind but not either like their new neighbors and fellow workers. New hybrid identities are being developed that are grounded in ancient civilizations like China, Turkey, Cambodia, and Mexico. Resources are shared between homes far away and their newly staked homesteads (Warriner, 2010). The children of the diaspora bring with them to school deeply held affiliations with their home lives while they decode the values, beliefs, and literacies of their new communities through the medium called school (New London Group, 1995). Long buried legacies of slavery, oppression, and treaty violation founder below the surface of the lives of African American and American Indian children who remain constrained by social and economic structures that preserve settled and less contested systems of privilege and entitlement within the US (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher & Ortiz, 2010; Brayboy, 2005).

More than 65 percent of the students in the central cities of the US are children who are linguistically and culturally diverse (KewalRamani, Gilberson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007). States range in their experience with this diversity from 95 percent in the District of Columbia to four percent in Vermont (KewalRamani et. al, 2007). These local, lived experiences filter how communities, families, students, and professionals understand and create narratives around the meaning and purpose of special education. Thus, the special education system straddles the figured worlds of families, students, and communities because it is charged with finding children who are disabled and providing services and supports that will address their needs and counter the disadvantages they may experience without support (Florio-Ruane, 2001). Therein lies one of the most profound conundrums facing special educators: at what cost is the help that might be offered and what is that help?

Dissatisfaction with teachers and what they know has been laid at the feet of universities across the country (Gehrman, 2010). Complaints focus on inadequate curricula, poorly delivered instruction, poor selection processes, absent exit criteria, and out-of-touch teacher educators. The complaints come from frustrated school and district administrators, politicians, the media, as well as from families and

pollsters. Little of the rising rhetoric is nuanced with careful examination of the challenges of teaching in

complex, multicultural settings where mandated curricula abound, class size surges, opportunities to learn

are constrained, and professional judgment is curtailed. Further, robust research on disproportionally

discouraging educational outcomes for students of color, English language learners, students who are

Gay, Lesbian, Bi and Trans-sexual, and students who are dis/abled--such as graduation, drop-out,

discipline, and achievement-- continues to point out the inadequacies of many current educational

processes.   Special education as it is currently practiced may have some role in producing these

outcomes, although none of these issues are created through single or simple conditional relationships

(Artiles, et al, 2010).

Within all of this complexity, the articles in this TESE issue seek to explore what lies ahead for

the relationship between general and special education teacher preparation. In subsequent sections, I

explore why incomplete understandings of difference and schism between the practice and research

communities must be engaged to move ahead in the conceptualization of collaborative teacher education

programs. In examining the design and delivery of collaborative teacher education programs, these

articles offer insight into what perspectives have been omitted or glossed over. As you read these articles,

consider the dialectics that you want to engage and who should be included as you find a third space to

wrestle with these tensions in your own work.

Why Are the Perspectives Reflected in this Issue So Important?

This special issue on Collaborative Teacher Education helps frame a set of dialectics rather than

debates that need detailed discussions grounded in what is known and unknown about the education of

teachers and in particular of the education of teachers across disciplinary boundaries. These six dialectics

acknowledge multiple perspectives, multiple epistemologies, and multiple visions of the role and function

of education for *All* students. By creating a *third space* to engage each dialectic, the importance of

listening to multiple voices in ways that value the contribution of each is emphasized.

Dialectic One: Learning as a Social Enterprise

Learning and teaching happen in arenas inhabited by unique constellations of students that in concert create specific dynamics and interaction patterns that are familiar but not like any other constellation. Like the stars that form our celestial constellations along with the planets and other matter that are within the gravitational pull of each star, some of what counts as a constellation is visible to the eye but more is hidden. Suspended within a network of individual and collective histories and cultural expectations, a classroom comes alive through the transcendent narrative constructed because of the specific individuals present. Thus classrooms comprise learning networks that are different from the interaction between an individual and a teacher (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). Learning in a classroom of 30 students is not merely 30 relationships between teacher and student. It is compounded by the myriad learning possibilities between students, between groups of students, and between groups of students and the teacher (Brett & Cousin, 2010). Knowledge is constructed in those relationships and is embodied within the group rather than the individual. Replace a quarter of the class and the nature of the unit changes. Moreover, the conditions for learning are changed as are the power relationships that are built on having access to the code of the classroom and schooling cultures (the New London Group, 1995). Gallegos, Cole, and the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition (2001) note that it is in the interaction of the cultural histories that teachers and children bring with them to the classroom, coupled with the institutional cultures of schooling that a classroom culture is constructed. The resulting *negotiated* culture, through its patterns and rituals, affords and constrains learning for its inhabitants.

Dialectic Two: Negotiating Learning Epistemologies in Program Design

How classrooms are conceptualized as well as the nature of learning drives the script for what and how learning occurs. The description of classroom in the previous paragraph will produce very different approaches to how teacher education should be conducted than a description of learning that foregrounds the individual and psychological needs of learners. Both approaches achieve particular kinds of results for learners. Imagine engaging sets of colleagues who conceptualize classrooms and learning in such

very different ways in these conversations (and perhaps you already have). The nature of collaborative

teacher education programs require that general and special education faculty bring together diverse

perspectives on what constitutes the fundamental building blocks of learning. Consider the 200 such

projects across the US in 45 states trying to engage this conversation in the late seventies and early

eighties. As Pugach, Blanton, and Correa remind us, the conversation is always multi-lateral. At that

early stage of the work, not only were teacher educators grappling with their divergent perspectives about

the nature of learning, but state departments of education were trying to make sure that teacher education

programs produce the much needed teachers to people the newly mandated classrooms across each state.

To accomplish the task, under pressure, with competing demands, early programs omitted some of the

more complex issues addressing intersections between race, gender, class, culture, language and their

impact on equity.

Dialectic Three: Competing Visions of Special Education Delivery

Mainstreaming, integration, the regular education initiative, and finally, inclusive education,

made their ways into the teacher education scene. Most often, the concepts emerged as special education

practitioners, researchers, and policy makers tried to find a way of connecting to the core functions of

education without being wedded to all the practices. In the name of access and social justice, some

families and advocates pushed for more opportunities to learn in general education classrooms while other

families pushed for more specialized programs and services away from the sometimes messy and

distracting spaces of general education classrooms. P-12 program design was complicated since a push

towards more inclusive design meant pressure from those demanding more specialized services and vice

versa. Where local districts and the state education agency had a programmatic preference for one kind of

interpretation and faculty at teacher education institutions preferred another, friction existed and persisted,

creating dichotomies between the role of teacher education and P-12 programmatic leadership. In some

respects, these schisms have become so deeply entrenched that they facilitate the "us and them" frame for

assigning responsibility for troubling results from public education.

These schisms are implicit in Oyler's description of the program at Teachers College in New York City, where more than 23,000 students in special education receive services through District 75, 13% of the more than 175,000 students receiving special education services in the New York City Public School System (New York State Education Department, retrieved from the web 3/14/2011: http://www.p12.nysed.gov/sedcar/state.htm). The teacher education program works to engage its teacher candidates in seeing the capacities and assets that students bring with them to school rather than their deficits and cultural deficiencies. As Oyler describes it, an important part of the program's concluding semester is working with teacher candidates to help them make meaning of organizing and sorting students against a backdrop of questions about the purpose and meaning of such activity in terms of its benefit to students and families as well as to the public purpose of education. By learning to both practice in and contest what schools do, the program positions itself as an agent of change and improvement in the public school system. This is a familiar position for many teacher education programs and is certainly represented in the teacher education literature (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Dialectic Four: Exploring the Power of Collective Learning

Pugach, Blanton, and Correa explore tensions between specialized technical knowledge, context, and critical dimensions of education, asking questions about how special education was conceptualized, for what purposes, and whose benefit. McDiarmid and Cleventer-Bright (2008) remind us that a focus on the discrete aspects of individual teacher skill sets assumes that knowledge and learning exist within the individual and fails to acknowledge the semiotic, cultural interactions within teaching communities that signal what and how to behave as a teacher. The context and underlying assumptions about the public purposes of education (Goodlad, 2004) influence and shape which skills, with what degree of emphasis, and guided by whose authority, get selected and used in classrooms. By suggesting that professional knowledge is generated and persists because of *collective* knowledge building and the effects of a publicly practiced activity, Pugach, Blanton, and Correa reframe the ways that we understand the process of becoming an educator and what it means to become a special educator.

They go on to explore how collaborative programs developed and why. Among many incomplete understandings between and among general and special teacher education faculty were the views of the role and function of teachers and teaching in the learning process. The first *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* in 1990 explored how teachers develop their praxis and professional stances, yet there was little nod to special education in that volume. In the third edition of the handbook, published in 2008, the section on difference foregrounds cultural difference without much reference to the intersections between multiple forms of difference. How difference gets named, by whom, and for what purposes is as critical for examining how ability is sifted and selected as it is for how culture is perceived as a within child and group variable as opposed to the complex, dynamic role that it plays in how rules, patterns, and rituals are established and persist over time.

Knowing that students need to actively participate in their learning changes the nature of teachers' roles and identities in learning (Artiles & Kozleski, 2010). The learning sciences frame the traditional role of teachers and teaching as "instructionism" (Sawyer, 2005). New research requires teacher educators, teachers, and teacher candidates to understand that learning results from active engagement in constructing meaning through engaging, resisting, and developing mental schemas about the way things work. As a result, the technical aspects of teaching involve observing, listening, mediating, and supporting learning, all informed by ongoing assessment and the calibration of learning tasks to scaffold continuing student progress. If this is true for students in the P-12 arena, it is also critical for our teacher candidates both to engage the narratives that characterize how teaching is understood and to build counter narratives that allow them to explore, extend, expand, and reframe the everyday issues they experience in practice and in their university courses. Oyler makes this case in her article, *Teacher Preparation for Inclusive and Critical (Special) Education.*

Dialectic Five: Where Do We Go from Here?

Given that different theoretical and pragmatic perspectives undergird teacher education program design, Blanton and Pugach's paper on the development and use of a classification schema to help program designers locate their own work and that of colleagues in other programs offers a way of

examining how programs are developed and delivered. Blanton and Pugach make the point that there are multiple reasons for laying out a framework in which teacher education programs can be understood. They go on to define what is meant by collaborative teacher education, in which the preparation of general and special educators is practiced through reciprocal and responsive curricular design and practice settings that afford opportunities to develop habits of mind and practice for collaborative team work on behalf of P-12 students. Important aspects of program design include program structures, the ways in which faculty engage and persist in learning from one another, explicit conceptual frameworks, and programmatic outcomes that address not only roles and practices but also credentialing from government bodies.

Program design can be elegant on paper but thorny to implement with consistency and sustainability without the ongoing discourses that create space for teacher educators and teacher candidates to wrestle with the pesky realities of everyday contexts. Assessment and its relationship to curricula is particularly telling. The ways in which individual assessments are used to judge progress, calibrate supports, differentiate experiences, and make program improvements offer glimpses into the ways that professional learning is conceptualized within programs. Measures of programmatic outcomes offer another perspective on where and how learning is conceptualized as occurring. To engage in collaborative teacher education programs across general and special education is to parse difference within and among the roles and responsibilities that general and special educators are conceptualized as having.

Dialectic Six: Evidencing What We Know and What We Need to Know

Brownell and her colleagues advance the conversation by helping to frame the rationale for studying programs that define themselves as collaborative. They identify aspects of programmatic research that help to answer the questions of resource investment: (a) cost-benefit analyses, (b) impact on P-12 student performance, and (c) impact on improving access, opportunities to learn, and equity in the distribution of material and human resources. The importance of engaging the public conversation about what kind of teacher education for what outcomes is critical. At a time when Salman Kahn

(http://www.ted.com/talks/salman_khan_let_s_use_video_to_reinvent_education.html) is offering a

mathematics curriculum online while engaging problem-based learning applications in class, what

teachers must be prepared to do is radically changing. The field needs to be able to trace the trajectory,

what it means for preparing teachers for the new learning environments (online and in person), and how

teacher education programs can collaborate across old boundaries to produce teachers for 21st century

learning. This means that learning takes place in the realm of innovations, experimentation, and

exploration. We can ask no less of ourselves as teacher educators. We have to innovate, experiment, and

explore to generate new forms of learning to learn, support the ways in which teachers conceptualize their

roles, and provide new visions for the meaning of *classroom, teach*, and *learn*.

James Gee remarks that some of his most difficult and challenging learning has come in the form

of video games that stretch his analytic, synthetic, and generative muscles (2005). Understanding the

power of video, gaming, and second life environments changes the meaning as well as practice of

teaching, curricula, and assessment. It also changes who designs and conceptualizes these roles. In the

gaming world, biology facts are trivia unless they are applied actively as a discovery game. There is no

"not ready for" biology track in gaming. Instead, playing the game and advancing through levels,

individuals acquire the knowledge sets and skills they need to move from level to level and in essence

"win" the game. The differential may be time, the time that learners take to master each step of the

process. With unlimited opportunities to engage in understanding how to solve problems, penalties

associated with taking longer to master a particular sequence are minimal, unlike traditional schooling in

which time to mastery is critical in not getting left behind (Gee, 2008). Understanding that playing

requires the acquisition of skill sets allows secondary education to move from an ontology of teaching

that is built on knowing increasingly complex sets of relationships to learning through the process of

trying to solve complex biological problems that often require crossing boundaries between physical

sciences in order to become increasingly skilled in conceptualizing problems and approaches to their

solutions.

What Else Do We Need to Consider?

Beyond the four articles represented in this special issue, there are additional issues that bear consideration as we seek to understand, improve, and, possibly, transform the ways in which we conceptualize the relationships between special and general education teacher education programs. Differences in the developmental challenges and needs for learning tools emerge as children move from early learning environments at home, in their communities, and in day cares, nursery and pre-schools, and kindergarten. Tools for learning include the development of language as a way of representing the world and guiding action, the development and use of mental tools for interpreting and making meaning of the world, and the reciprocal nature of building relationships with peers, siblings, family and community members along with learning to negotiate interactions with teachers, doctors, and people in other professional and service roles. Understanding that these processes develop through the cultural milieus that children can access, Rogoff's work (2003) reminds us that notions of developmentally appropriate tasks vary among and between cultural groups.

As early childhood recedes and the tasks of middle childhood emerge at school and home, we are reminded that much of the evolving nature of schools has occurred in elementary and to some degree in middle schools. Tools for learning emerge as critical elements for navigating the world of school: literacies in math, reading, writing, and digital technologies are essential. Referencing the learning sciences again, students need to engage their identities as learners, participate in interactive learning environments in which feedback provides immediate and calibrated responses to student production beyond measuring response-to-intervention. Elementary schools and the work of elementary and special educators in them have begun to reflect these new ways of designing and supporting children's learning. Teacher preparation programs for both general and special educators seem better equipped at the elementary level to prepare teachers for these new realities since elementary programs in both fields are more attuned to the differential development of children than secondary programs that foreground content ontologies over learning to learn schemas.

At the secondary level, much of what exists is bounded in disciplinary notions of what constitutes knowledge and how is it developed and reproduced over time. The big challenges to our education system lie in understanding the power of interdisciplinarity, in which the affordances of multiple disciplines are brought to bear on the complex and seemingly intractable human, environmental, political, and physical challenges of a shrinking planet. A number of strong research groups such as the LIFE Center at the University of Washington, the Learning Sciences Institute at Vanderbilt, and the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh, within the US, as well as Sweden's Linnaeus Center for Research on Learning, Interaction, and Mediated Communication in Contemporary Society, and several others throughout the world, are working on understanding how to develop and extend learning tools designed to engage, explore, and expand understanding within and across academic areas. A number of recent studies have underscored the need to redesign high schools that seem to stymy learning on many levels (e.g., Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008; Lachat, 2001). Teacher education programs could help to lead the revolution in secondary education, but they must also address the degree to which their contributions are considered trustworthy by local school district partners, businesses, and state governments (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

Finally, we cannot expect to engage important steps forward in how special and general educators understand and enact their work with students without acknowledging the inadequacies in how inclusive education and response-to-intervention have addressed the issue of difference—that is, without accounting for the ways in which different local contexts identify, understand, and respond to difference. If teachers are going to have the agency to address these notions in their own practice, teacher education programs will need to account for the ways in which historical and contemporary notions of difference are constructed, maintained, and used to manage the industry of education.

What Do We Hope You Engage?

The articles in this issue provide ways of considering the work of teacher education programs. By creating a lens through which to consider the nature of teacher education, its outcomes, practices, and dilemmas, the authors help to set a stage for building a strong evidence base for how collaborative teacher

education programs evolve over the next 10 years. The dialectics reside in the ways in which we decide to engage our work as a community, sharing practices, challenging assumptions, questioning design, and complicating what and how we measure impact. To be in a third space together means that we suspend assumptions about being right and take the time to consider and explore the unfamiliar, question, and above all, listen to one another and possibly, silence the shrill critic within us all. We cannot do this work without deeply valuing technical, procedural, and conditional knowledge. But too narrow a lens on doing may mean that we forget to (a) interrogate the most useful unit of analysis that focuses our work on the conditions in which learning occurs, (b) soften our assumptions about agency within individuals, and (c) ignore the power differentials that are embedded in the ways that we sort, classify, and organize work. Thus, the discipline of a Third Space means that we are willing to examine how our professional practices and values may muddy our analytical stances.

To engage ourselves in teacher learning requires crossing boundaries between what general, special, and English learners need, to name a few ways that schools recognize and name difference. It also means that we need to understand deeply the role of school in supporting early, middle, and secondary students' understanding that needs are complicated by a number of factors within systems (e.g., urban and rural, high and low incidence disabilities). Further, the impact of race, class, and difference on the ways that professional knowledge is conceptualized and reified can be contested, explored, and countered through the historical perspectives, theoretical frameworks, research methodologies that we choice to employ.

This special issue of *TESE* makes an important contribution to *what* needs to be examined in collaborative teacher education programs. It does so by deepening our focus, reaching back into history making explicit how our past informs where we are. It also does so by providing a framework for understanding the activity arena called collaborative teacher education and it does so by providing a set of questions about our approach to research that will surely result in more robust research about the work. Finally, it shifts our gaze by examining the ecology of one program, set in the context of what remains the

largest school system in the US, reminding us that our students are a tapestry of the cultures, languages, and histories of the world and our teachers must create opportunities to learn for each and every one.

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